



## At USDA, consumer protection is a joke

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The good news is that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has created a new label to help consumers know when grass-fed meat actually comes from animals that, you know, were raised on grass. The bad news is that this is George W. Bush's Department of Agriculture - where business always comes first and consumer protection is a joke.

After five years of discussion, the USDA has finally issued formal standards on what constitutes grass-fed meat.

Indeed, the new rules say that the label should only be applied to meat from animals that eat grass rather than those that are fattened on grains, animal pellets, and God-knows-what. So far, so good. But here come the "however's."

Instead of guaranteeing the bucolic purity that the term "grass-fed" implies, the USDA's standards allow the use of artificial growth hormones and antibiotics to force cows and other animals to fatten faster.

Also, rather than happily foraging in rich pastures of grass, the animals can be confined in massive factory operations for long periods of their lives.

Oh, and this being a Bush regulation, participation in the verification process is voluntary! Any agribusiness outfit can slap a USDA "verified" "grass-fed" label on its beef, even if its cows lived in cages and never ate a single blade of grass. When verification is voluntary, a label means nothing.

That's why the honest-to-goodness producers of true grass-fed meat are appalled. Refusing to go along with what they see as a consumer fraud, these producers are setting up their own labeling system, using the certification process of an independent, nonprofit, sustainable ag group called the [Food Alliance](#).

To keep up with the development of a consumer label you can trust, contact the American Grassfed Association: 877-774-7277.

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